

29<sup>th</sup> May 2020



**Chief Executive**

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Council Offices  
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Good afternoon

As we come to the end of our 10<sup>th</sup> week of lockdown, we want to focus once again on how important the community response to the Covid-19 pandemic has been. Before we do so, we would like to update you on the work we are carrying out alongside our partners to safely re-open our schools and businesses.

Our schools have been open to certain children throughout the current situation but we can now confirm that our schools will welcome some additional children from 1<sup>st</sup> June. This is currently limited to Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 children as well as vulnerable and key worker children, although further announcements will be made soon by Central Government. We appreciate that some parents and pupils will feel anxious about the return to school and we would like to assure them that we have worked closely with our schools to ensure that any risks are kept to a minimum and that pupils are able to resume their studies in a safe environment. We have placed some FAQs on our website to answer some of these concerns, which can be found here:

<https://info.westberks.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=48861&p=0>

From 15<sup>th</sup> June, many non-essential retailers will be allowed to welcome customers back in order to assist with the national economic recovery. We have already been working with our town centre groups, councils and businesses to assist them with this as many additional measures and procedures will need to be put in place in order to do this safely. Hospitality businesses are likely to be allowed to re-open in July, which will also require further safety precautions. It was announced on 24<sup>th</sup> May that additional funding would be given to us to allow these re-openings to take place safely and we will be announcing our full plans shortly.

Moving back to our focus on community response, we would like to highlight that next week is Volunteers' Week. We have mentioned how grateful we are to our volunteers a number of times over the past few weeks but we want to take the opportunity to do this once again. The past few weeks have been very difficult for all of us, particularly for those who have lost a loved one. Whilst nothing we can say can make this any less painful, the way in which volunteers in our community have come together- unprompted- to help each other has been a comfort to so many vulnerable people across the district.

Fittingly, a few weeks ago the Newbury Weekly News featured an article from 10 years ago when the voluntary community in West Berkshire being recognised as the best in the country. This rings as true now as it did then. The altruism and empathy that local people have shown towards each other, particularly recently, is overwhelming and a clear part of what makes our district such a great place to live.

Of course, we work alongside volunteers throughout the year. In our libraries, on our school governing bodies, on town and parish councils, in our day centres and much more besides, volunteers offer their skills, time and expertise to benefit other residents. Much of what we do as a council could not be done without them and we are immensely grateful that they choose to serve their community in this way.

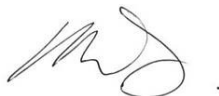
In recent years, we have worked hard to empower our community and voluntary groups to manage local facilities in ways that best meet the needs of their area. The example of Hungerford Library springs to mind, where local people have been successful in opening up the building for wider use by the community for events, craft fairs and much more. People in the town have really benefitted from these new uses and we are so proud of the commitment of these local volunteers.

As time goes on, and as we have reflected to you in previous weeks, we want to ensure that the community groups and networks that have evolved as a result of the current situation are able to keep going and to work with us for the good of all in the district. If you haven't already done so, we would strongly encourage you to complete our Covid-19 survey for residents. This piece of work is important to us as we want the community to shape our approach to recovery and every one of your responses will do just that. We will also be looking to announce further ways of maintaining this good work in the months ahead. The survey can be found here:

<https://info.westberks.gov.uk/residentsurvey-covid19>

Finally, and as always, thank you for your patience, cooperation and support as we work together to keep West Berkshire safe. The scale of what we have achieved together in the past few months is significant and we are grateful to you.

Yours sincerely,



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